

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE AMERICAN NEOCONSERVATISM FROM THE START TO 2008

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**Budapest
2010**

Subject of research and approach

Neoconservatism in America is a subject of research in history of political ideas, economics, political theory, sociology etc. since the first third of the '70s and its review and defence has a history of almost four decades. Many of its founding fathers wrote their reminiscences and some neoconservative texts became beloved pieces of the political literature and anthologies. Internationally well-known researchers were members of it like Lipset and Bell in sociology or Huntington and Fukuyama in foreign policy analysis. Many politicians and one wonderful president – namely Ronald Reagan – were denigrated by neoconservatism, which in the '80s might have found supporters not only in America but in Great-Britain and West-Germany, too. However, after 11 September 2001, since the second-generation of the neoconservatives started to make their voice heard (and obtained weapons with the help of the power of their words), it is difficult to decide why America behaves on international field in the first decade of the 21st century the way it does. Those who put the whole question in a more simple way might argue by rejecting neoconservatism totally by accusing the neoconservative rebels of the '60s with the failure of the anti-terrorist war. The conceptual and interpretational disorder is only sharpened by the ignorance of the fact that in the seventy year old past of neoconservatism there is a serious caesura which divides the two generations from each other.

The assimilation of neoconservatism in Hungary during the Kadar-era appeared only in two volumes – highly reflecting the tendencies of the period -, and in shorter articles and other publicisms on different standards. Besides these, the contemporary Hungarian publishers and experts of neoconservatism expressed their opinion in the topic.

In order to be able to understand the different trends of neoconservatism, just as to evaluate American political history, it is indispensable to create an *extensive* concept of the idea itself. This dissertation would like to present the specific evolutionary history of the political ideas of neoconservatism from the very beginning till 2008. This work attempts to present and evaluate the American neoconservatism as a modern conception and ideology, concentrating on its mental, philosophical, theoretical and political foundations. At this point it is necessary to state that in order to analyse neoconservatism, we also have to have a closer look at on the historical and social environment it was born into, so it is essential to

review (or at least to have a spotlight on) the paradigm of the American neoconservatism and the development of American thinking, on the US political system etc. In addition, we also have to touch on the specifics of the 1950-60s and the following period. Here, however we do not analyse the whole governmental politics, but only concentrate on the crucial points in which the conservatives played a role or which advanced its organisational and theoretic development. Firstly, this work wishes to introduce the structure of neoconservative idea and ideology history of political ideas (its mentality, philosophy, value- and interest orientation) and secondly, it gives a try to favour its historic genesis (its development, institutionalization and organisational life).

It was not a hidden attempt to write this work as to serve as a model, too. A model to do research in modern ideas which are closely attached to a nation's inner values and interests, but later because of certain outer and inner changes suffer refraction and follow their paths in a different way from the intended one. We might feel ourselves lucky, since *we try to analyse a conservative idea which goes through sweeping changes and becomes an ideology*. With the help of this we managed to achieve a further goal too, namely to prove the non-ideological nature of conservatism.

In the formation of this work a real challenge was created by the fact that neoconservatism as a *contemporary modern idea and ideology* is placed in a political-power scope and all kinds of literature (special literature of politology, history of political ideas, foreign policy, international relations, public policy, governing history) steps into this scope or the scope pulls it somehow or effects it in a way. This is the reason why it is difficult to work according to objective criterias or in a purely academic way, since in the case of this topic not a two hundred years old political idea is discussed but a complex school, which in today's international power constellation greatly influences the image of the dominant country.

The structure of the dissertation

While creating this work it seemed inevitable to discuss our conclusions on American political thinking and give special attention to the American neoconservatism's basic structure which suited organically and successfully into it (here the reference to the past tense is purposeful).

Accordingly, this paper is divided into three main parts. First, since we wanted to illustrate the whole intellectual, cultural, historic and political environment of American neoconservatism, it became necessary to prepare some introduction-like parts. For this reason, in the first topic we discuss neoconservatism itself, its political characteristics. Second, we introduce the philosophical, political, economy theoretical and international aspects of neoconservatism. Third, we give an overview over the approximately six decade long path of neoconservatism since the end of the Second World War till the end of the Bush administration. In the last two topics – which cohere very much – while introducing the ideas and political history of neoconservatism, we make an effort to emphasize the distinction between the two generations and also clarify the ideological differences.

It is far from our aim to hide our opinion that while the first version of American neoconservatism meant the traditional American culture's authentic actualisation, we strongly attack by criticism the revolutionary neoconservatism. The proportion of these three topics is one third to two thirds for the good of topics discussing neoconservatism. With the help of this kind of structuring we do believe that we managed to give account of the basics of American political thinking and to embed neoconservatism in an understandable way. However, without the previous overview of the special American intellectual environment, those parts dealing with neoconservatism itself only would have been incomprehensible on their own.

The result of the research

In our dissertation we wish to follow the idea of neoconservatism from the beginning till the end of the first decade of the new millennium. It is hard to grab and explain the genesis of an idea and it is even harder to go through a road which after the continual development and completion faults, distorts and "*leaves the rails*" and continues its way on revolutionary new metals. This is the reason why it is complicated to write about American neoconservatism in an objective, schematic or even a descriptive way. The contemporary neoconservatives from the new generation would surely not agree with our narrative, just like on the other end of the coin the palaconservatives would also strongly disagree with us, since they both treat the neoconservatives from the beginning of times like the Trojan horse itself within the walls of the right-wing.

Although for us it is unambiguous that the neoconservatives after a one and a half decade long preparation in the '60s became a *special American anti-revolutionary phenomenon*, which later in the '80s - at the same time with the Reagan revolution - achieved its completeness and in 1988-90 mostly attempted to trace back the country to the normal circumstances (with the help of Irving, Kristol, Tucker, Kirkpatrick and Huntington). In this period, many drew the attention to the fact that the right-wing might not survive the victory of the Cold War, the anti-communist conservative wing might easily fall apart and the already existing divergences might strengthen.

One of the most important scene of this and its most decisive effect occurred just in the neoconservative group when the idea has changed and the anti-revolution "left the rails" so much that out of one of the American neoconservatism's most innovative stream has become a unipolarist, empire-building ideology. After the forty years old history in the life of neoconservatism a twenty year long period followed, which was in total opposite with the original message.

Taking it all round, the causes of "leaving the rails" we find in the changements of the international environment and in the wrong attitude of the new neoconservative generation. Let us have a closer look at on these two components. First, it is doubtful whether the dynamism of the changement of the coming-up generations induces any kind of changement on intellectual, ideological or political field. We do believe that it does. Although the concept of generation now we do not mean on macro- but on micro-level, since we speak about generations within one idea. However, it seems logical to reminder the theoretic draft of Mannheim about the problem.

Generation change in the course of history of a long-life idea is natural, since a younger generation takes over the thoughts of the elder one - certainly getting acclimatised according to the new era's requirements – and transferring those onwards. At this point it is important to mention in case of our topic that out of the elder generation only four people (N. Podhoretz, Decter, Novak, Muravchik) share the thoughts of the new generation, while within the members of the new generation there is nobody who would agree with the thoughts of that of the first. All this demonstrates that the generation change cannot be a negligible factor. But let us move on!

In 2001, the Bush administration's neoconservative government members were in age closer to the first neocon generation, although in their thoughts closer to the second. Many of them can be considered as first-generation member as for their age, although do pioneer work in the new neoconservative subject. The reverse of this cannot be supported, however. It follows from this that the generation change is an unavoidably important factor of neoconservative altering, but the real revolutionary impact way maybe something else (too).

After these "lines of crosstalk" let us state that neoconservatism is in a special position that here *the generation change mostly comes together with the biggest border-line period of the 20th century: with the very end of the bipolar world order*. This situation and the type of intellectual reaction to this determined the way neoconservatism followed its way. Although in case of a school of thoughts the main question behind is always the philosophy itself or the nature of philosophy behind its ideas. In the beginning neoconservatism was standing on the basis of realism of anthropology, transcendent discretion, western Christian culture and American institution defence, so it was a conservative idea and followed the path of political realism and political philosophy. After the world-history changes, thanks to the reacting new generation *the inner philosophic core has exchanged* and opened the door towards becoming an ideology. The decisive change of neoconservatism is due to the fact that in the new post-bipolar position the elements of political rationalism – the so called unipolar bias, universalism, optimism, perfectionalism, abstraction, utopism – covers its philosophic seed which already inspires (even by violence) its progress.

According to our main conclusion, since neoconservatism has "left the rails", it tends to be ideologic, politically dogmatic and has become a thought to democratize the whole world and within this to call *Pax Americana* into being. The spread of liberal democracy and *New World Order* is specifically progressive, that is to say, it is a characteristic of an ideology which takes its own dynamism from the endless progress of the future.

Publications about the theme of the dissertation

Book

Az amerikai neokonzervativizmus. Egy kisiklott ellenforradalom. Századvég, Bp. 2008.

Essay, workpaper

1. A konzervativizmus-kutatás nemzeti látószögéről. *Kommentár*, 2007/5. 61–67.
2. Amerika konzervativizmusai. Az amerikai konzervativizmus három mai meghatározó irányzata. *Valóság*, 2008/1. 25–39.
3. A spontaneitás ideológiája. Konzervatív Hayek-kritika. *Kommentár*, 2008/2. 83–94.
4. Óriásszamar és törpeelefánt. *Kommentár*, 2010/1. 76–92.

Bookreview

Kijózanodás. *Kommentár*, 2010/4. 64–69.